

For Immediate Release

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Second West Nile Virus Fatality Confirmed in New Mexico *State's Total Cases Now at 45*

SANTA FE -- The state Department of Health announced today that a 68-year-old man from Bernalillo County with laboratory confirmed West Nile Virus encephalitis has died. The man was hospitalized in Albuquerque. He was among the cases the Department announced last week. This is the second fatality due to West Nile Virus in New Mexico this year.

Eight other cases have also been confirmed today, bringing the total number of West Nile Virus laboratory-confirmed cases to 45 in New Mexico so far this year. The new cases include three from Bernalillo County, a 51-year-old woman with meningitis, a 48-year-old man with meningitis, and a 12-year-old girl with milder illness; a 32-year-old man from San Juan County with milder illness; a 59-year-old woman from Dona Ana County with milder illness; a 74-year-old man from Taos County with meningitis and encephalitis; a 53-year-old woman from Sandoval County with milder illness; and a 45-year-old man from Quay County with milder illness. This is the first reported case from Quay County this year.

"Our sympathies go out to this man's family at this difficult time," said Michelle Lujan Grisham, Secretary-Designate for the State Department of Health. "Although serious cases are very rare, this is a sad reminder that West Nile Virus is in our state and anyone of us could become its victim. The Department of Health will continue to work closely with local officials to test mosquitoes for the virus and target areas where those tests come back positive."

Cases so far this year are at a lower total than at this time last year. On Sept. 8, 2003, the State had 83 confirmed cases of West Nile Virus including four fatalities compared to 45 cases so far this season with only two fatalities. The first fatality this season was a 76-year-old man from San Juan County.

"We had hoped West Nile Virus cases would be lower this year due to the public being better educated and prepared. However, the number of infected mosquitoes cannot be predicted and there is still a month or so left in the West Nile Virus season, which ends at the first frost," Grisham said.

"The fact that we are seeing less cases so far this year may be an indication that people are taking the virus seriously and taking steps to protect themselves. Despite the lower numbers, people still need to be diligent in taking precautions against the virus when outdoors. West Nile Virus is one of the few

viruses in which infection can be prevented with a few simple steps and people should continue to follow those steps until their area experiences its first frost.”

West Nile Virus can cause flu-like symptoms such as fever, nausea, headache, and muscle aches. If someone feels they have the flu and are feeling sick, they should see their health care provider. Those over 50 years old are at most risk for serious disease from West Nile Virus.

The Department of Health continues to recommend that people take the following steps to reduce the risk of West Nile infection:

- Stay indoors at dawn, dusk, and in the early evening.
- Wear long-sleeved shirts, long pants and socks whenever you are outdoors.
- Use insect repellent products with no more than 35 percent DEET for adults and follow the directions on the label for children ages 2-12. Products containing soybean oil and eucalyptus oil have also been shown to be effective but need to be applied more often.
- Keep windows and doors closed if not screened. If you leave your house doors or windows open, make sure they have screens that fit tightly and have no holes.
- Do not allow water to stagnate in old tires, flowerpots, trash containers, swimming pools, birdbaths, pet bowls, etc. Tightly screen rain barrels or empty at least twice weekly.

New Mexico’s total number of West Nile Virus cases is now 45. Total number of cases for each county include: Bernalillo, 7, Doña Ana, 6, McKinley, 1, Rio Arriba, 1, Sandoval, 4, San Juan, 20, Eddy, 1, Taos, 2, Quay 1, and Santa Fe, 2. Seventeen of the 45 cases have had the severe form of the disease with neurological involvement.

In collaboration with the Albuquerque Environmental Health Department, local mosquito control programs are collecting mosquitoes regularly and submitting them for identification and testing. Positive mosquitoes have been collected so far this year from Bernalillo, Doña Ana, Otero, San Juan, Sandoval, Santa Fe and Sierra counties. However, even if positive mosquitoes have not been identified in an area, West Nile Virus is considered to be in every area of the state and all people are urged to take precautions.